

OMI report: Teen in county custody died of heroin overdose

By Chris Quintana

The New Mexican | Posted: Tuesday, August 19, 2014 9:00 pm

Medical officials said Tuesday that a Santa Fe teen died of a heroin overdose in May while she was in the custody of county authorities, raising questions about the care she received at the juvenile detention facility.

According to a report from the state Office of the Medical Investigator, 17-year-old Desiree Gonzales died early May 8 at Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center, where she was transported from the Santa Fe County youth detention center on Airport Road after a guard found her unresponsive. Hours earlier, Gonzales had been discharged from Christus following a naloxone treatment for a heroin overdose. The drug, often known by the name Narcan, reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.

The hospital, after discharging Gonzales, released her to county law enforcement officials at about 10 p.m. May 7 because police had discovered there was a warrant for her arrest. At 1:45 a.m. the next day, a police report says, a guard at the youth detention center found that she was “unresponsive” and “not to be breathing.” She was then rushed back to the hospital, where she was pronounced dead.

A blood test for Gonzales revealed naloxone, the active ingredient in Narcan; lorazepam, a medication commonly used to treat anxiety; and morphine, a substance that can be metabolized from several opioids, according to a toxicology report.

A urine test revealed morphine and 6-monoacetylmorphine, also known as 6-MAM, a metabolite that is specific to heroin.

Lead medical investigator Dr. Sam Andrews says in the OMI report released Tuesday that it appeared, “based on statements from the involved staff at the Santa Fe County Youth Development Center, that the decedent was exhibiting features of central nervous system depression during and after her intake into the facility. This likely represented recurrent central nervous system depression after the reversal effects of Narcan had worn off.”

The report noted that Narcan can reverse opioid overdoses, but it “has a shorter duration of action than most opioid drugs,” and that the toxic effects of the opioid could reoccur and lead to death.



OMI report: Teen in county custody died of heroin overdose

Desiree Gonzales



OMI report: Teen in county custody died of heroin overdose. The Santa Fe New Mexican Local News

Dr. Bruce Trigg, a former state Department of Health doctor who helped craft guidelines on treating overdose cases with Narcan, said the autopsy investigation raises questions about the girl's care at the juvenile detention center: Did the county administer Narcan to Gonzales while she was in its custody?

There was no mention in the autopsy report about whether a second dose of Narcan was administered by detention center staff.

Trigg said if Narcan was administered to a patient suffering an overdose, it would have made a difference.

"It will reverse symptoms immediately," Trigg said. "You couldn't do any harm with it."

Kristine Mihelcic, a spokeswoman for Santa Fe County, could not be reached for comment Tuesday. For a previous article, she said the youth detention center does have Narcan available. But she and other county officials have refused to provide details about the medical treatment given to Gonzales at the jail, saying the government cannot comment on cases involving juveniles or those facing pending litigation.

"State law prohibits records from a local detention facility pertaining to a child in its custody from being 'disclosed directly or indirectly to the public,' " read a statement issued by Mihelcic in July. "This law imposes criminal penalties on those who improperly release such records. Complying with this legal prohibition should not be interpreted to mean that we do not wish to be transparent or that the Youth Development Program's very brief custody of the youth that died at Christus St. Vincent's Hospital is beyond scrutiny."

According to a police report, Gonzales and a friend had been using heroin May 7 at an apartment complex in the 1400 block of Zepol Road, and it had been awhile since she had last used the drug. After the friend noticed Gonzales was suffering from overdose symptoms, she called 911, and emergency responders administered a dose of naloxone. Gonzales was taken to the hospital at 7:30 p.m.

Even though Gonzales' mother was at the hospital, the report said, law enforcement officials took her to the county juvenile detention center when they found she had an active warrant for failure to appear in court.

Arturo Delgado, a spokesman with Christus St. Vincent Regional Medical Center, said immediately following Gonzales' death that he couldn't comment on the case. But he said it's up to an attending physician to decide if a patient is medically sound and ready for discharge. Delgado said a physician would consider the patient's disposition, among other factors, and that every patient is different.

County officials also have said they do not admit patients from the hospital unless they have been medically cleared.

At the time of Gonzales' death, Santa Fe police had issued an alert about an unusual batch of heroin, one that had sent two other people to the hospital with overdose symptoms.

Attorney Lee Hunt, who represents the Gonzales family, said he has filed a tort notice in relation to the case, but he hasn't yet filed a lawsuit.

Contact Chris Quintana at 986-3093 or cquintana@sfnewmexican. Follow him on Twitter at @CQuintanaSF.



Girl who died of overdose should never have been released from hospital, father says

Girl was 'out of it' following arrest, police say

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -

Following an area teen's heroin overdose death, her dad is saying she never should have been released from the hospital so soon.

"It just pains me," said Waldo Anaya.

He said he never imagined burying his daughter.

"(It's) just a tragedy that should have never happened," he said.

VIDEO: Girl who died of overdose should never have been released from hospital, father says

Desiree Gonzales, 17, died of an overdose this past week.

"She was a teenager," said Anaya. "She was young. Everybody makes mistakes."

According to a police report, Gonzales was released after fewer than two hours.

"I do believe she was released too early," said Anaya.

An area medical malpractice attorney said releasing her so soon is suspicious.

A hospital spokesperson wouldn't comment on the case, but said the hospital doesn't have standard procedures when dealing with overdose patients. He said there's no set time for how long they should be kept in the hospital.

He added it is always up to a doctor's judgment on whether to release a patient, and according to police, that's what happened with Gonzales.

Gonzales had a warrant out for her arrest, and after leaving the hospital was taken to the Juvenile Detention Center. Police said she seemed "out of it" and was having a hard time breathing.

About three hours after being booked, Gonzales was found unresponsive, so she was taken back to the hospital where she died.

County officials overseeing the jail said they are investigating and guards frequently checked on her.

Santa Fe police are investigating a possible bad batch of laced heroin because Gonzales was one of three overdoses within two hours, all in a 4-mile radius. Investigators said the other two people survived. A hospital spokesperson would not say if the hospital is conducting an internal investigation.

The Office of the Medical Examiner is investigating the death.

Gonzales' family set up a [fund to help pay for](#) funeral expenses.